

VZCZCXRO0132
RR RUEHTRO
DE RUEHNJ #0989/01 2061012
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 251012Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4138
INFO RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 1216
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0832
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0702
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 1140
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 0279
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0891
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1487
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 0610
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 2755
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1892
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 1284
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0782
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0845
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI 0275

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NDJAMENA 000989

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LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER
NAIROBI FOR OFDA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/25/2011
TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM KCRS CD
SUBJECT: CHAD'S POLITICAL DIALOGUE DEADLOCK

Classified By: POL/ECON OFFICER MICHAEL P. ZORICK, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY:

¶1. (C) Post's monitoring of Chad's political pulse since the May 3 Presidential poll indicates, with each passing week, less and less life in any of the ideas so far proposed to bring a political solution to Chad's institutional crises. The two major blocks in the face-off, roughly centered on President Idriss Deby Itno and on the Coordination of the Political Parties for the Defense of the Constitution (CPDC), have backed themselves into their respective corners, and there seems no out for them to meet each other half way. Deby will do whatever it takes to ensure his own regime survival, while the opposition insists that his marginalization must be the end result of dialogue. The opposition will not trust any initiative that comes from Deby, and will not entertain dialogue without international community control of the process and armed rebel participation. The two sides appear to be irreconcilable. If there is any chance of breaking the deadlock, President Deby will have to demonstrate more convincingly than he has so far that this time he is serious about reconciling with his opponents and undertaking real reform. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Post has engaged over the past several weeks in extensive political consultations with a wide variety of players from among Chad's political elite. We have had a series of private conversations with members of Chad's legal political opposition; individual "Wise Men" from President Idriss Deby Itno's committee of the same name; with regional governors, business leaders, and civil society activists.

¶3. (SBU) In each case, we have asked our interlocutors the same questions: Where is the "escape hatch" from Chad's current political, military, economic and social crisis? What is required of each of the key actors to allow them to

walk through that door? Are they capable of the political and personal compromises necessary to pursue constructive dialogue? Do they believe the country is in crisis -- and do they want peace? We have discerned some patterns to the responses we have received, but there is one common element to virtually every conversation to date. No one to whom we have talked believes that it is now possible to have a credible political dialogue that can address Chad's many critical problems.

BLAME THE OPPOSITION

¶4. (SBU) Lamana Abdoulaye, a Committee of Wise Men member who is the head of a Deby-allied political party, "Union Nationale", as well as the President of the petroleum revenue oversight body, perhaps best represented the school of thought that may be summed up as "the Opposition Refuses to Talk".

¶5. (C) Lamana and other Deby allies dismiss the leaders of the legal opposition parties grouped under the umbrella of the Coordination of the Political Parties for the Defense of the Constitution (CPDC) as having no impact whatsoever in the country, unless they agree to dialogue on the President's terms. Per Lamana, Chad's political parties, rather than drawing support and funds from a popular base, are instead charities which must have resources to hand out in return for voter support. As they are outside government, the opposition parties in the CPDC have no money or ability to influence public opinion, and the President can safely ignore them. And, since each of them was at one time a Deby ally

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and minister, their credibility is suspect throughout the county's political class. This is all the more true when the CPDC members take as their starting point for dialogue the international community imposing on Deby acceptance of significant curtailment of presidential and executive power. According to Lamana, Chadians see this as an unsophisticated effort by politicians on the "outs" to use the international community to remove Deby from office. This, Lamana said, the President would never accept -- and because he has control of the state's levers (those few that still function), he has no need to acquiesce to these terms.

¶6. (C) Lamana said that the opposition politicians should face facts: The President will remain President, and will exercise the powers of the executive. The best the opposition can do is to conduct a cooperative dialogue with the government, which President Deby seeks to launch through his Committee of Wise Men. The President can then conduct the affairs of state, and return to the discussion as a "referee" if needed to keep things moving along. Lamana thought Deby would allow such a dialogue to address CPDC members' major concerns from 2003 -- a new census, achieving a balanced electoral board, and cleaning up the electoral code. Lamana thought this would already be a huge step forward, given that Deby had previously refused to even consider changes to the electoral code, and the opposition should be satisfied with this -- all other subjects they have proposed, including government, security, or financial reform, were prerogatives of the executive, and could not be the subjects of a political dialogue.

¶7. (C) This school of thought finishes its argument by acknowledging that the opposition politicians cannot accept to participate in a dialogue on these terms. As Lamana points out, they have already made very public their starting point -- that Deby accept a process of dialogue that is controlled by outsiders (AU, EC, UNDP, donors) and is predicated on curtailment of his powers. Anything less is absolute defeat for them, and so they will continue to refuse to talk to the President. And, in their refusal to talk, they leave Deby free rein. He will continue to "govern," and

they become daily more irrelevant.

¶ 8. (C) Lamana and others close to Deby -- especially Committee of Wise Men member and Presidential Counselor Abderahman Moussa -- save special mention for the opposition's insistence that representatives of the "political military groups" (the armed Chadian rebels) be included from the beginning of a political dialogue. They suggest that the political opposition seems to somehow draw legitimacy-by-proxy from the armed groups, despite the absence of formal ties. Deby allies point to the opposition's idea that including the armed groups in dialogue goes hand in hand with the requirement that the international community control the dialogue process. Neither idea is in the least acceptable to President -- he cannot openly negotiate with men who want to overthrow his government, and he cannot allow the international community to impose this on him.

¶ 9. (C) However, no less than Deby's Minister for Foreign Affairs told us that Deby's envoys are in fact discretely negotiating with selected members of the armed opposition, a clear recognition that they represent a much greater threat to him than the political opposition. Past history shows Deby to be adept at buying off his most dangerous opponents with cash or position as he did with former National Resistance Alliance rebel-turned-current Telecommunications and Post Minister Brigadier General Mahamat Garfa. He has been equally adept, when these reconciliation efforts have turned sour, at killing off his armed opponents, as he is accused of in the case in 1993 with Abbas Kotty of the National Rectification Council (CNR), or in 2000 with Moise

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Kette Nodji and the Committee for a National Beginning for Peace and Democracy (CSNPD).

¶ 10. (C) This, then, is the rub. The President's advisors and "wise men" say Deby is fully prepared to conduct a highly "presidential" type of political dialogue. They point to the political opposition's declarations and refusals to cooperate in such a conversation, and say it proves these men and their parties are simply not relevant. They say the President will nonetheless move forward with his process, and talk to those who will talk to him: the 38 parties formally allied to the President's MPS Party, and those of the remaining 30-plus parties that are neither with the CPDC nor with the MPS alliance.

THE PRESIDENT CANNOT BE TRUSTED

¶ 11. (SBU) Key CPDC members Lol Mahamat Choua (RDP), Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh (PLD), Wadal Abdelkader Kamougue (UDR), Salibou Garba (AND), Saleh Kebzabo (UNDR), and Jean Alingue (URD), have maintained strong solidarity since the May 3 presidential election that they all boycotted. Privately and publicly, they have stayed on-message on the essentials: (a) that no credible political dialogue is possible without the full involvement of the international community to hem in President Deby; (b) that armed rebel groups must be integrated into the dialogue, a requirement that creates a near-necessity for the conversation to be held outside Chad; (c) that discussions must begin with an explicit, public Presidential admission that the country is in crisis that requires wide-ranging political, social and economic reforms to address; and (d) that the conference will exercise considerable powers, currently under the President's executive control, in the process of addressing the crisis.

¶ 12. (C) Privately, at least some members are willing to envisage that this process might entail keeping Deby in the Presidency for the entirety of the next five years, as he believes he is entitled by the results of the May 3 election. But they are clear that such a presidency would be gradually

shorn of many of its executive powers, as the process of electoral reform led to parliamentary elections, and that new parliament -- brought to office without Deby's interference, and so presumably now representative of Chad's political class -- took action on political and economic reforms.

¶13. (C) The oppositionists are adamant that, as currently proposed, the President's ideas for political dialogue are designed to ensure two things: that the international community is distracted by regular shows of empty political exchanges among the 60-plus parties not member of the CPDC, and thus sidetracked from asking the President to open Chad's political system; and that the President stays entirely in control of the country. CPDC members are loath to join in any such process, knowing that where the international community may be fooled, the Chadian people won't, and their political viability will be demolished by participating in a Deby-led charade. Those who have told us about invitations they have received from Deby's personal emissaries to engage in talks have all therefore so far rejected these overtures.

¶14. (C) Thus, they're stuck. In the opposition's view, President Deby will only engage in a masquerade, including plenty of grist for the papers and radio, but no opening for the country to address the crisis building in its society, in its economy, and at its borders. They cannot accept being drawn into such a process, and by cooperating, legitimize the President. They thus refuse to engage, and continue as best they can to raise the warning alarm: As long as there is no credible dialogue, and no attempt to directly involve the armed rebel groups, these latter will organize, plot, and

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inevitably attack if they can settle their internal questions of political leadership. This is not a result the CPDC members seek. They have few illusions that the rebels, should they take power by force, will then hand it to the political opposition.

COMMENT: IS THERE ANY WAY OUT?

¶15. (C) Discussions with representatives drawn from across Chad's political elite show virtually no room at this time for a credible dialogue between President Deby and his political opposition. We expect Deby will seek to keep the international community distracted with regular announcements of committees, meetings, conferences and papers on dialogue. He will likely succeed in buying off some of his opposition. Others will self-marginalize by their refusal to talk on his terms. Still others he will accuse of associating with armed rebel movements, a charge of which some will be guilty. Deby will refuse a legitimizing voice in any discussion to armed "political-military" groups, leaving them to fulminate in the south and east -- and to plot. Chad's political opposition will most likely continue to stand aside, doing nothing to accommodate Deby, and proving themselves to be essentially as irrelevant to the solution of the country's problems as the President believes them to be.

¶16. (C) We, along with the European Union and other international partners, have called repeatedly for initiatives that could break this deadlock. But no amount of coaxing or strong-arming on our part will get very far if the major actors themselves are not committed. The key rests largely in President Deby's hands. He needs to demonstrate that this time he is sincere not only about talking with his opponents, but also about introducing the reforms necessary to open up the political system. To have any hope of being taken seriously, he will have to launch several initiatives at the outset, e.g., formation of a government of national unity with powers to pursue a credible reform program, electoral reforms before next year's legislative elections, a commitment to handing power over to a new leader after his next term is complete. If he fails in this attempt to reach

out to his enemies, the odds are stacked dangerously in favor of more fighting over political succession, not the beginning of a political dialogue for peace. END COMMENT

¶17. (U) Tripoli Minimize Considered.
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